

Point Loma Light - 3rd Class  
near San Diego, California  
SAN DIEGO Co.

HABS Cal. 41  
HABS  
CAL.

27-POLO

1-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 4

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Wm. P. Lodge, District Officer  
California Bank Building  
San Diego, California

Point Loma Light - 3rd Class  
near San Diego, California

HABS Cal. 41

HABS  
CAL.

37-POLO

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PAGE 1



Historic American Buildings Survey  
H. C. White, Photographer Dec. 4, 1934

LIGHT OF SAME MANUFACTURE AT POINT PINOS, CALIF.

NEGATIVE (3 1/4 x 5 1/2) FILED HABS CAL. 27 (CONTINUED, 1-1)

Point Loma Light - 3rd Class  
near San Diego, California

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
H. C. White, Photographer

Dec. 4, 1934

STANDARD CORNICE

NEGATIVE (3 1/4 x 5 1/2) FILED UNDER CAL, 27-MONT.V, 1-2

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Department of Commerce  
Bureau of Lighthouses  
Washington

September 9, 1924

Winifred Davidson  
Point Loma, Calif.

Dear Madam:

1. With further reference to your letter of July 3, 1924, relative to Point Loma Light Station, Calif.:

2. You are respectfully advised that the old Point Loma Lighthouse ("Spanish" Light) now used as a daymark, was established November 15, 1855, and was rebuilt on another site and lighted March 23, 1891 (Lower Light -- W.D.) and that Ballast Point Light Station was lighted August 1, 1890.

.....

5. The upper light, in accordance with custom, was placed out of commission when the new light was established in 1891.

Respectfully,

J. S. Conway

Acting Commissioner of Lighthouses

THE SITE

Cabrillo's Landfall

Cleland, Robert Glass: Pathfinders, pp. 5-6

Beyond Todos Santos, on the twenty-seventh of September, three months to a day from their departure from Navidad, the Spaniards came to three small islands which they called the Islas Desiertas. As they sailed by these barren outposts they saw on the mainland behind them the smoke of many fires and large valleys running down to the sea, and back from the coast a range of lofty mountains. Thereupon, for the first time in recorded history, Europeans landed on the shores of California. The chronicler of the expedition, speaking always in the third person, in the following undramatic and matter of fact language thus records the epoch-making event:

"On the following Thursday they went about six leagues along a coast running north-northwest, and discovered a port, closed and very good, which they named San Miguel. It is in thirty-four and one-third degrees ..."

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Engelhardt, Fr. Zephyrin: San Diego Mission, pp. 3-4:

... Cabrillo with the two ships San Salvador and Victoria entered the bay on Thursday evening, September 28, 1542. It was the eve of the feast of St. Michael, the Archangel, wherefore the commander christened the port San Miguel.

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Chapman, Charles E.: History of California, the Spanish Period, p. 66 et seq.:

... Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, the first European navigator to reach the coast of Alta California ... At last on Thursday, September 28, 1542, after three months of voyaging, Rodriguez (Cabrillo) and his men "discovered a port, closed and very good which they named San Miguel." They were in fact at San Diego, and had achieved for themselves the glory of discovering Alta California, -- all unwittingly, for to them it was the same land as before ....

HISTORICAL NOTES AND PICTURES COMPILED BY

WINIFRED DAVIDSON, HISTORIAN

SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AND

JAMES G. LANGDON

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

On an old chart a place not far southeast of the foundations of the White Tower -- popularly in San Diego known as "Old Spanish Light-house" -- is designated as "La Punta de la Punta de la Loma de San Diego;" that is, "The Point of the Point of San Diego Hill."

San Diego Hill (Point Loma) came under the notice of the Congress of the United States when in 1848 the first provision for aids to navigation on the Pacific Coast was made. At that time the sum of \$15,000 was set aside for lighthouses at Cape Disappointment at the mouth of the Columbia River and at New Dungeness at the entrance to Puget Sound. This amount proving inadequate, Congress appropriated \$143,000 for nine lighthouses, a fog signal and several buoys on the California and Oregon coasts. Not until 1855, however, did Point Loma Light, the last of the series of Pacific Coast beacons then erected, begin its service. November 15, 1855 the lamp was lighted for the first time.

There had been a series of delays and mishaps, including the shipwreck at the Columbia River bar of the bark "Oriole," which lost the materials for Point Loma and four other lighthouses. As a result of this disaster, it was recommended by the lighthouse engineer "that hereafter all estimates for the Pacific Coast be four times higher than for like work on the Atlantic."

The first issue of San Diego's pioneer newspaper, the Herald, May 29, 1851, announces:

"The officers of the U. S. Coast Survey are now actively engaged in the survey of this harbor, preparatory to the selection of a site for the Government lighthouse at this point.

"The gentlemen engaged on this duty deserve great credit for the energy and ability with which they have pushed forward this important work. We understand that the survey will be completed in about one month and we hope that the result of their labors will soon be made public.

The following gentlemen are connected with the survey:

"R.D.Cutts, Esq., Chief of the Triangulating party;  
George Davidson, Esq., Chief Astronomer; John Rock-  
well, assistant; A.H.Harrison, Chief Topographer;  
James S. Lawson, assistant."

In the San Diego Herald of April 15, 1854, is this information:

"The lighthouss now in the course of erection on Point Loma will when completed make the 8th and last to be ersoted on the Coast of California and Oregon. These buildings were contracted for in Washington by Messrs. Gibbon and Kelley of this City. W. J. Timanua, Esq. (McManus --W.D.) who ably represents those gentlemen, has furnished us with the following dimensions of the building, which will be of sandstons and bricks, the former to be found in abundance on Ballast Point and on Point Loma, the latter with cement, lime and lumber are now being landed on Ballast Point by the schooner Vaquero.

"The walls will be twenty feet high from the foundation and the entire building 20 ft. wide by 38 ft. long. There will be a cellar of six feet in the clear; the main building will be 9 ft. 2" in the clear, and the attic 3-1/2 ft. The 'tower' will be situated directly in the middle of the building and will be 10 ft. in diameter, thus leaving on each side rooms 14 by 20 ft. A spiral staircase will lead through the tower to its height, which is to be 38 ft. from its base; thus there will be an elevation of 433 ft. from the level of the sea. A kitchen and other out offices are also to be erected of wood in the rear and when oompleted will form a useful ornament. Due provision being made for light as well as ingress and egress. The lanterns and lenses are coming direct from Paris whence they have been ordered and will be of the very latest improvement."

This apparatus, known as a Frssnel lene, coneisting of a system of annular lenses, refractors and reflecting prisms, surround a centrel lamp. The various forms of lenses in use in lighthouses are designed on the Fresnsl principle. It was of such apparatus that Alen Stevenson wrote:

"Nothing can bs more beautiful than an entire apparatus for a fixed light of the first order. It consists of a central belt of refractors, forming a hollow cylinder six fest in diameter and thirty inchss high; below it are eix triangular rings of glass, forming by their union a hollow cage, composed of polished glass, ten feet high and six feet in diametr. I know of no work of art more beau- tifully creditable to the boldness, ardor, intelligence and zeal of the artist."

The first Fresnel lens installed in the United States was at the Navesink Light in 1841. In 1853 only five U. S. stations were so equipped. But in 1855, when Point Loma Light first shone, all light-houses of the first order were being equipped with Fresnele. Economy and practicability were combined with beauty in this apparatus. One lamp now did the work of many. And oil was becoming alarmingly expensive. Fish oil, sperm oil, colza oil, lard oil and kerosene were in turn in use at the Point Loma Light. Of these sperm oil was longest in use here. Much of it was tried and coopered on the sands of Ballast Point, where for many years two wheling companies were operating.

In the August 11, 1855 issue of the San Diego Herald appear these details:

"Schr. Gen. Pierce, Capt. Badger, which arrived on Friday morning last brought down the lantern and other fixtures for the Lighthouse on Point Loma, which will be put up immediately under the superintendence of Messrs. Smith and Franklin, who came passengers on the Schooner for that purpose. Although the work will be commenced at once, we understand that it will require some two or three months for its completion, on account of the alterations and repairs necessary to be made on the house. We may expect to see the light in operation about the first of November."

The report of the secretary of the Treasury of the United States on the condition of finances for the year ending 1855, includes at page 409 this letter signed by Hartman Bache, Maj. Topographical Engineers, Bt. Maj. and Captain Edm'd L.F. Hardcastle, Engineer, secretary Light-House Board, Washington, D.C.

"Point Loma Light-House -- Visited this light September 5th. Coping course of stone had been removed, and after raising the tower two bricks in height, to give the domical arch sufficient thickness, were replaced, and cramped with iron. Holes for the uprights of the lantern, and the channels for the brackets of the gallery, had been cut to receive them. The sleeping drum and iron man-hole, to replace the one of wood, deficient in size, were also set in the domical arch -- the top of which was leveled off and well coated with cement. The lantern and lighting apparatus, which had reached the Light-house, with slight exceptions, in perfect order, were in course of cleaning preparatory to putting up. The dwelling is of stone, and with the exception of the mortar, which is very bad, is quite a creditable piece of work. The tower is of brick. The mortar is not entirely bad but the brick itself of such poor quality, that in places they have wasted away to a depth of a quarter of an inch to two inches. The pointing, both in the dwelling and that part of the tower



exposed to the weather, is entirely gone. Directed the deficient bricks in the tower cut out and replaced by good ones, and then so much of it as rises above the roof of the dwelling, as well as the brick eaves of the latter, plastered or rough-cased with cement; also the stone work of the dwelling pointed anew. The cistern in the cellar being reported as not holding water, ordered the bottom raised by laying a pavement of brick in cement, and then coating the entire interior with the same material. The content of the cistern is but 1240 gallons; whereas, estimating the consumption of 10 gallons a day (that is 3 gallons each for  $3\frac{1}{3}$  persons) for 270 days, there would be required 2700 gallons, or more than twice as much. Propose to use caeks for any additional water that may be required over and above the quantity the present cistern will hold, leaving the question of an additional cistern for future consideration. The water for building and household purposes has now to be brought  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles (from San Diego river near Old Town -- W.D.) The two-mule wagon will bring a cask of 80 gallons by 12 M. The brick and cement necessary for the additional mason-work, mentioned above, have been sent down to Point Loma. Also red paint to paint the tin roof, which appears in pretty good order, and a few panes of glass to replace those broken out. The cellar is 6 ft. high in the clear, well built and pointed, and the floor laid with tile, from an old Mexican fort nearby. (This was Fort Guijarros on Ballast Point, built by Spaniards -- not Mexicans -- at the close of the 18th and opening of the 19th centuries. -- W.D.) Tin oil cans were found in it, 2 ft. 1" in diameter, 3 ft. 2" high, straight, then conical for 5 inches; the top being 1 ft.  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter; wooden bottoms; tin of the poorest kind; flat bands; so safety-flap to cocks, no drip pen. Very rusty and doubtful if they will hold oil.

"Mr. Frenklin, in charge at Point Loma, was of opinion that he would get through in six or seven weeks; had commenced work on Monday, August 20, when he could leave Mr. Smith, his assistant, to finish, and instruct the keeper in the use of the lamp, &c. A letter from Mr. F. of the 19th received since my return, says: 'I am soldering the dome and get it ready, so Mr. Smith can do the rest when I am away.'

"I should call your attention to the fact that, in the expectation this light would be a first-order light, a keeper and two assistant keepers have been appointed for it.

"Full measurements were made of the dwelling, tower, &c. Three views -- two of the site and one from the side --

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were also taken ... at least some of these views will be forwarded to the Board as soon as the draughtsmen can be spared from other and more important work. (Note: these views were drawings, of course, not photographs. -- W.D.) I send now a tracing of Point Loma Light-house, including the 3rd order lantern ...

"I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant."

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The San Diego Herald of October 13, 1855, has this note:

"We learn from Mr. Smith, the gentleman employed in placing the lantern on Point Loma Light-house, that the work is nearly completed, so that on Monday or Tuesday next the light will be lighted for the purpose of testing the machinery."

The next newspaper item referring to this event is dated November 17. It says:

"We understand that orders have been received by Captain James Keating, Keeper of the Lighthouse on Point Loma, to light up on the 15th of November ..."

This is certainly interesting from a journalistic standpoint. Two days after the event, which must have been witnessed from the hills behind the old Herald office in Old Town, the "lighting up" which according to official records took place in No. 355 of the Twelfth Lighthouse District, designated as Point Loma Light, took place at sunset on the evening of November 15, 1855, was reported as still in the future, something still to be expected!

KEEPERS OF POINT LOMA LIGHT

1855-1856:	Oliver S. Witherby, Supt.	
	James P. Keating	\$1000.00
	G.B. Tolman, 1st Asst.	650.00
	Ant'y Genar, 2nd Asst.	500.00
	(Genau, Genan or Geeran)	
1857:	John P. Keating (James P.)	1000.00
	Julius Semen, Asst.	650.00
1859:	W.C. Wiley	800.00
	Julius Semen, Asst.	500.00
1861:	W.C. Price	800.00
	S. Fields, Asst.	500.00
1863:	W.C. Price	1000.00
	S. Fields, Asst.	625.00
1865:	W.C. Price	800.00
	O.P. McAlear, Asst.	625.00
1867:	W.C. Price	1000.00
	(Assistant not listed)	
1871:	Enos A. Wall ("Jack")	1000.00
	Robert D. Isreal (Israel) Asst.	600.00
1873:	Robert D. Israel	1000.00
	Mary A. Israel, Asst. (his wife --W.D.)	625.00
1875:	Robert D. Israel	1000.00
	Mary A. Israel, Asst.	625.00
1877:	Robert D. Israel	1000.00
	Jos. Stone, Asst.	625.00
1879:	Robert D. Israel	1000.00
	Jos. Stone, Asst.	625.00
1881:	Robert D. Israel	800.00
	Jos. Stone, Asst.	600.00
1883:	Robert D. Israel	800.00
	Victor H. Richtet, Asst.	600.00
1885:	Robert D. Israel	800.00
	Philip Savage, Asst.	600.00

1887:	R.D.Israel	800.00
	David R. Splaine, Asst.	600.00
1889:	R.D.Israel	800.00
	*****	
1891:	R.D.Israel	800.00
	Thomas Anderson, Asst.	600.00

There were also connected with the work of keeping Point Loma Light No. 355 Joseph Reiner and Jose Maria Covarrubias. The difficulty of assembling these names is suggested by the following letter received in the summer of 1824 from J.S. Conway, acting Commissioner:

"It is regretted that a recent fire in the Department of Commerce building destroyed many valuable records relating to the construction of lighthouses on the Pacific Coast, and such as were saved are not in condition for easy examination. It is therefore impracticable to verify your list of the keepers, but one record here indicates that G.B.Tolman was the first keeper of old Point Loma light and that A. Geeran was the assistant Keeper."

James P. Keating was, as listed, first keeper; Tolman his first assistant; Geeran (Genau?) his second assistant.

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W. Jeff Gatewood, first editor of the San Diego Union (established in 1868) in January 1869 describes an excursion:

"...visited the airy lighthouse on Point Loma. The day was one of the many indescribably lovely ...

"... The road though bad is not at all difficult. A very little labor would make it a good one. We passed beside some yawning pits and chasms made by the winter torrents in their mad career from the summit to the bay -- on either hand upon the mountain side the wild sage and southernwood were putting out their leaves and the young tender blades of grass and graceful vines and ferns in every shade of green peeped from the fruitful earth ...

"As we paused upon the dividing ridge to gaze upon a scene so majestic, so far beyond the 'poet's pen, the painter's art,' our friend attracted our attention to the northwest where rose the Santa Catalina and San Clemente Islands, some eighty miles away. And yet so pure and rare the atmosphere they seemed quite near and looked like leviathans rising from out the vasty deep.

"Beneath us near where the breakers dashed against the shore some rusty iron boilers marked the place where once some followers of the Mormon brotherhood delved to find the bed of coal supposed to underlie the mountain and the bay.

"The white sails of the pursuing whaleboats flashed far out upon the ocean, but nearer in among the kelp the smaller boats lay waiting for the whale.

"A short drive up the ridge brought us to the lighthouse upon the 'towering topmost height.' A fence enclosing about an acre and a half surrounds it. Mr. Jenkins, the keeper, met us at the gate and escorted the ladies to the entrance where they were received by his wife. Neatness and order prevailed in the little enclosure. The flower beds surrounded by sulona (abalone--W.D.) shells, the tidy walks and neatly arranged beds of cultivated earth told at a single glance the story of the taste and industry of these industrious inhabitants of this lonely tower. Beside the walls of the house some tomatoes were just ripening, while well grown potato vines and other garden vegetables luxuriated in the genial sun and wooing breeze.

"The house is strongly built of sandstone and the iron tower rises many feet above the cone; stone steps lead to the entrance door and thence by circling narrow steps the light is gained ...."

An early woman journalist "Maggie May" writing in the San Diego Union February 22, 1874, gives a bit more atmosphere:

"... The carriage road to the Lighthouse here (at Roseville) leaves the shore and ascends to the mesa of Point Loma. The ascent is quite steep but one is more than repaid for the exertion of climbing it by the view obtained from the summit. To say that the scene is incomparable, gives but a faint idea of its real grandeur or beauty! The whole bay, with its surrounding towns; its shipping, the highways branching off in a hundred directions .. the three river mouths which yearly bring their springs to pour at the feet of the mild old Pacific, and the Peninsula (North Island -- W.D.) which forms the boundary of our harbor, with its miniature bays; and the little cabins of the fishermen, with their boats flitting to and fro over the clear, blue waters ...

"The lighthouse upon the extreme point of Point Loma is some fourteen miles from San Diego (New Town -- W.D.) and is approached by one of the most beautiful drives in the world, to those who enjoy the cool, bracing breezes ... The buildings consist of a very neat and commodious dwelling house surmounted by a tower fifteen feet high, also several immense sheds erected by the government for the purpose of catching rain-water enough during the rainy season to fill the cistern. (This is the cistern in the basement of the lighthouse; not the two outside cisterns -- W.D.) These roofs are very flat and are arranged with spouts, etc. Water and wood are items of considerable importance here, both having heretofore been brought from San Diego. We were conducted through the entire establishment by the gentlemanly keeper, Mr. Israel, and his wife, who is his assistant in the care of the light, which is very ingenious. Everything is scrupulously clean; the glass reflectors of the lantern fairly dazzle the eyes. There is a small room in the tower, below the light, for the accommodation of the watchers, and here they pass the long hours of the night, watching alternately the light of the huge lantern, which is a welcome beacon to the 'toilers of the sea' who may be within reach of its rays. (Note: This small room is now sealed up.-- W.D.) The light, which is 480 feet above the ocean (?) can be seen upon clear nights a distance of sixteen or eighteen miles. The roar of the wind about the tower is almost deafening, and necessitates the voice being raised to the highest pitch whilst conversing within.

"The vegetation around the lighthouse is very meagre, consisting of very low, scrubby sage brush. Mrs. Israel told us that she had endeavored in vain to make a few of the most hardy flowers and vegetables grow, but the position was too much exposed to admit of cultivation ..."

Addendum to  
Point Loma Lighthouse No. 355 (Point Loma Lighthouse, Old)  
Cabrillo National Monument  
Point Loma  
San Diego County  
California

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94102